

Holy Children

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[0 : 00] In 1 Corinthians chapter 7, and especially the words of verse 14. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband.

Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy. Especially that second part of the verse, but as it is your children are holy.

Well we know that the apostles faced many difficulties, many issues over which they had to take decisions as the gospel made its way into pagan cities such as Corinth.

We read from this letter itself the difficulties that the apostle and his companions faced as they sought to set out regulations and principles of lifestyles for these people who are now coming into the church and to form the church of Jesus.

Coming from that pagan society and that pagan background. And one of the issues that they had to deal with in that was the issue of marriage.

[1 : 22] Because in that pagan society, many if not most of the men would have had not just a wife, but other companions or other partners. They frequented prostitutes in Corinth.

It was well known for such practices in that pagan society. And so when they came into the church, the apostles faced the question, what do we do then with those relationships?

What do we do with men who don't just have one wife, but many wives or many partners? And of course Paul emphasizes there the sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman, which we still of course maintain as God's principle for marriage and for married life.

And he takes us through in this passage how we need to face up to temptations in regard to sexual urges. And how these have to be dealt with in accordance with God's will.

And one of those being, of course, the principle and the practice of marriage in the terms in which God established it at the beginning. But then there was this other problem that some people had come to be members of the church, but still had a pagan partner.

[2 : 44] This is dealt with here in the case of an unbelieving woman, but the same holds true for an unbelieving man as well.

If there is someone in the church who is a wife and she has come to be a Christian and her husband is still a pagan and doesn't belong to the church, well, what do you then do with that relationship?

Do you annul it? Is it still valid? And what about the children of that marriage? Where do they stand in relation to God's people, God's covenant people, God's promises?

Are they still pagan if the father is still living a pagan lifestyle and doesn't belong to the church? Well, it's very interesting how Paul deals with it.

Because what he says is, if any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy or sanctified because of his wife.

[3 : 44] And the unbelieving wife is made holy or sanctified because of her husband. In other words, in that sort of relationship where you still had one partner who was a pagan and still living a pagan life, because of the one who was a Christian, actually, because of that one's relationship with God and with his promises, the pagan partner was still now regarded as being sanctified or brought into this covenant relationship with God because of the standing of the believing partner.

And that follows on into what it says about the children. Otherwise, your children would be unclean. In other words, if you had a wife who was a Christian with a pagan husband, still living a pagan lifestyle, Paul is saying, if this weren't the case, if there wasn't this principle of the one being sanctified by the other, then the children would still be regarded as pagans.

They would be unclean in that formal sense in which God regards people. And so he says, but as it is, they are holy.

And that's what I want to focus on this morning for a little time, the status of our children within the covenant community of the church.

And to begin that, we have to first of all look at the meaning of this word holy and this phrase made holy. The unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife.

[5 : 14] The unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. Now, we tend perhaps to think of holiness only in one aspect of the Bible's teaching of it.

And that's the first aspect. There are two aspects to holiness or to being holy in the teaching of the Bible. The first of them is the one we perhaps usually think of, which we can call subjective holiness.

In other words, holiness which involves a change within ourselves. Holiness where God does a work in our persons, in our souls, in our hearts, that brings us into the practice of holiness.

There's the change that takes place in our rebirth. The change that takes place in our regeneration. The change by which God implants within us a principle of life, which we then follow out in our conduct, including the pursuit of holiness.

The dealing with sin that the Bible calls upon us to deal with in terms of our being subjectively holy. Wanting to be holy in our persons, in our conduct, in our practice, in our thoughts.

[6 : 31] That's subjective holiness. You'll find it, for example, in 2 Corinthians chapter 7 and at the beginning of that chapter, where Paul has been dealing with the distinction between those who are not of God's people and those who are, in terms of this holiness of life.

He says, since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness or perfecting holiness, bringing it to completion in the fear of God.

That's an inward subjective thing. It's something that you know practically you are following out in your life. That's subjective holiness, where you take the standard of God and you say, that's what I want to be, that's what I want to follow, that's what I want my life to be like.

That's subjective holiness. But there's another aspect of holiness in the scripture, and that's objective holiness.

A holiness that does not in itself necessarily involve an inward change. And indeed, there are some things in the Bible described as holy, which you cannot actually think of as having an inward change anyway.

[7 : 50] Because when you go to the Old Testament, you'll find that God calls certain things holy, certain animals holy, because of the use that they are being put to.

The vessels, the instruments that were used, the vessels, the containers, the cups and so on that were used in the tabernacle, then in the temple, they're actually called holy vessels.

They are holy to the Lord. Animals are regarded as holy because they are going to be used in sacrifice to God in that system of the Old Testament, when animal sacrifices were carried out according to God's command.

These animals were specified by God as holy unto him and to his service. You'll find the temple called holy. You'll find places associated with God called holy places.

Now, there's obviously no inward change in regard to that. And yet, they're called holy, which means in this sense of it, in this second aspect of holiness and the meaning of it, it means to be set apart specifically.

[9 : 04] It means to be set aside for God's use or for God's service. It doesn't itself necessarily mean any inward change, but it does mean you're taking something or someone, and you are setting it aside for the use of God and for the use of God's service according to his own specification.

You can have objective holiness, therefore, without the subject of holiness. You can have some things, some animals, some people, as we'll see in Israel's case, set apart as a community that are specified as holy to the Lord, and yet not have an inward subjective holiness of life.

But you can't have the inward objective holiness, a subjective holiness of life, without having an outward setting apart and consecration to God as well.

And it's that second aspect of holiness that's dealt with in chapter 7, verse 14 of 1 Corinthians here, our text for today.

The people that are holy, the children as it is, they are holy. They're set apart in a category of holiness, a category in which they are regarded in a specific way by God, just as the people that are mentioned are, just as indeed we'll see the covenant community of God in the church as we see it.

[10 : 34] And that's what it extends to. These children are holy. They are set apart. They belong in a special category where God distinguishes them from all that are outside of that category, where God distinguishes them from those that belong, you might say, to the world that have never been part of the church, that aren't presently part of the church, that don't belong to the church.

Those you might think of in Corinth, the children outside of this community that this woman belonged to, who's now a Christian, her partner is out there in the pagan world and the pagan lifestyle.

The children are still in the family. That's the situation in the home. But Paul is saying, the children don't belong to that pagan community. They're regarded as belonging to this community of God's covenant people.

Therefore, they are sanctified. They are holy. They are in that sense objectively set apart as children with privileges, as children who actually belong to the church.

Now, you extend that principle. And what we're dealing with this morning, I think, is increasingly important to us as people of the church today, because by, as far as we can see, some of these things are actually not being kept up in our thoughts and in our practice the way they should.

[12 : 00] The visible church, is what we usually call the visible church, is the church as you see it. That's distinguished from what theologians call or used to call the invisible church.

We're not going to make much of that distinction. But the invisible church, effectively, is God's elect people. We don't know who they are. You can't actually see them and distinguish them and say, that's God's elect person and that's not.

The visible church, the church as we see it, is in fact visible. It's that covenant community of people who actually come together to worship God, who are visibly seen to be in a relationship with God, where through the gospel, they have a relationship with him, where they are objectively holy.

They are objectively God's set-apart people with the gospel, with the gospel's promises, with the gospel's teaching, delivered to them and to their children.

In the larger catechism, we have a definition of what the visible church is, if we keep using that term, which I think is still useful for us to keep using.

[13 : 12] The visible church is a society made up of all such as in all ages and places of the world do profess the true religion and of their children.

You see, that's the definition of the church as we see it. The church in its widest extent, if you like, as a people who gather to worship God regularly.

That's what it says. That's the visible church. It's a society made up of people who profess the true religion and their children. It doesn't say anything in that sense of saving faith in Christ.

That's a personal issue. That's something that you come to address through having been given the promises that belong to the covenant people of the visible church.

church. But as the visible church, as the church as you see it, as a community of people, we are in covenant with God through the gospel, as are our children, which, as we'll see in a moment, is why we have children baptized.

[14 : 25] As it is, they are holy. Now, if you think of Israel in the Old Testament, that's exactly what you find as a community. They were regarded as set apart from all other communities, from all other nations, from all other peoples in the world, to be a community to whom God gave these promises.

He gave them His word. He gave them certain regulations as a people. He gave them this in covenant with them. And the covenant is, I will be a God to you and to your children with conditions that they carry out in practice what the promises of God invite them to come to possess and to be.

And you trace that throughout the Old Testament where Israel are regarded as a holy people. And you know, people, when you come to the New Testament, these people are then, when the New Testament church is considered, the church in the New Testament, it's really one church effectively from the Old Testament through into the New, but different stages of development and so on.

And then you find, for example, Peter. In 1 Peter 2 says to those that he's writing to there, and of course, they're not Old Testament people anymore, you are a holy nation, a holy people, a people with privileges, a people who have been called by God through the gospel to be his visible people in the world.

In other words, you can say that God's people, God's visible church in the world are the covenant community.

[16 : 12] If we want to use that term, we might find it helpful. That means that this today is in this building God's covenant community. Everybody here belongs to the visible church.

Everybody here belongs to this community of believers in that sense in which we have this formal, through the gospel, this formal relationship with God where we have God and covenant with us saying, here is my gospel, here are my promises.

These belong to you, I've given them to you. They're the possession of every single person in here tonight, today, young or old. And it's being in that situation that gives you, as we'll see, the advantage or the privilege of making personal to yourself everything that God promises to be to his people.

The covenant is by way of the gospel, by way of this great promise that he will be a God to us and to our children. It's our responsibility to then take that and say, I must then make personal to myself everything that God promises to be to me.

If I believe in him, if I trust in him, if I obey him, if I give my life to him, if I really do all of that, then everything he's promised to me in covenant will become personally mine.

[17 : 42] I will possess it, it will be my own property, and God will prove himself through to me if I prove true to his promise.

The meaning of holy, then, is, in this sense of it, an objective holiness. It's something where a thing or a person or a people are set apart in a specific way into a certain category of people that are in relationship with God.

A relationship with God in an outward and formal sense where you have God addressing us through the gospel, giving to us the gospel, giving to us everything that the gospel contains by way of privilege, and therefore, we can say that we are a holy community today in this sense of holy from which we need to come to be subjectively holy by applying to ourselves all the things by which we need personally to be in a saving relationship with God.

Secondly, then, if that's the meaning of holy and made holy in that sense, what is the connection between children being holy in that sense and their baptism?

Well, again, you have to go back to the Old Testament and work your way through from there to the New Testament. That's so important for us that we don't begin with the New Testament when we think about baptism, when we think about a covenant community.

[19 : 21] You don't begin with the New Testament with the apostolic writings. You go right back into God's dealing with his covenant people from day one right through the ages.

And as you see Israel as a community of people in covenant with God, you have to say from the Old Testament itself, not every individual in Israel was right in heart with God.

Indeed, at times, many of them as a people were not right in heart with God. But God didn't say to them, my covenant is no longer valid, my promises no longer stand.

He still kept saying to them through the prophets. And indeed, you'll find that Isaiah and Jeremiah and others were using this very fact of being in covenant with God as an appeal to God to forgive the people, to draw them back to himself, and an appeal to the people to actually come to repent of their sin because they were a covenant people.

They were then a covenant people. They were being addressed by God as his covenant people, even though many of them were not in heart right with God at that time.

[20 : 36] They were still the covenant community of God. And that means that their children or the male children at that time had a right to bear the sign of that covenant in their circumcision.

That, of course, has been extended out in New Testament to female as well as male children. That's just part of the expansion of privilege that we find in the New Testament.

Circumcision was not an ethnic thing. It was not something designed to distinguish Israel racially from all other races.

It was a spiritual sign. It was a covenant sign. It was a sign that said, you as a people are in a special relationship with God.

A relationship that doesn't belong to any other people, but that belongs to everyone from other people if they come into the community of Israel. They are regarded then as belonging to the covenant community of God, and they come to have access to the promises of God just as those who are born as Jews did.

[21 : 57] And that's the same for the church in the New Testament age as well. And it's important that we remember and understand how we come to be members of the church.

Because we've come to the point where many people think of membership of the church as beginning with taking communion.

Now that has repercussions if that's what our thoughts are regarding membership of the church. If we think of membership just beginning at the moment that we take communion, that's what makes us members of the church.

then you're leaving everything before that as of little or no significance. And it has repercussions as we'll see regarding our teaching of ourselves and of our children.

Some people will say of those who belong to the church but aren't communicants. if something happens untoward in their life I've heard it said by people but they're not members.

[23 : 08] They're not communicants is what they mean but they are members if they've been baptized. And that's one of the important connections that we make that our lifestyle as a people in covenant with God is not to be thought of as beginning at our taking communion and from that point onwards it's from the point of our baptism onwards and that we should seek to be in our lives what our baptism actually sets out to be a people who personally know forgiveness and cleansing and that relationship with God that's at the heart of it.

So membership of the church does not begin when you take communion. Membership of the church the visible church the church as you see it begins at baptism or indeed more strictly speaking our children as they are born within the covenant community of the church they are already members of that covenant community and therefore they are baptized because they have a right to bear the sign of belonging to it.

That's the argument that's the logic and that's a Presbyterian position that's what we persuaded is the biblical position. They don't leave the child until their age to make their own minds up.

It's not something that is done at a certain point in their adulthood though that may be the case if they were not baptized as children but in our thinking and belonging to this covenant community you don't begin thinking about church membership at the point of taking communion or just before that it's at the point of your baptism.

In other words our children are baptized not to make them holy in the sense in which we've been seeing holy as objective holiness. We're not baptizing them in order to make them holy.

[25 : 11] We're baptizing them because they are already holy. That's what this passage is telling us isn't it? Otherwise your children would be unclean but as it is they are holy. They are regarded as belonging to this community of believers.

This community to whom God has given his gospel and these promises in the gospel. And therefore because they already belong to that people they have a right to the sign that shows they belong to that people.

The sign of baptism that is now in the New Testament what has taken over from the Old Testament sign of circumcision. And that means it's very important for us in this covenant community of the church that we don't leave our children unbaptized.

And it's important too that we stress for them and in their teaching and upbringing that we stress for them the privilege they have of already being members of the church of already having their behavior set in terms of their baptism.

Teach them what they are as well as what they need to come to be. Isn't that important? Because when you teach them what they are as members of this covenant community of the church, that will enable them hopefully to see the great advantage they have.

[26 : 50] It's not something they need to work towards. It's not something by their own contributions in life that they need eventually to come to be. Members of the covenant community of God, members of the church.

It's where you start with their teaching that they are already members of the covenant community of God, that they already belong to the church visibly as you see it, that they already have possession of the gospel and its promises and the advantages that that gives them.

And as we pass that on to them, and as we seek to teach them by example as well as by word of mouth, we pray that God will give them to see that that's where they begin thinking of their relationship with himself, as they grow up in years from the time of their baptism onwards, as they are taught by their parents and by us in the church, that they will come to look at their baptism in a way that puts to themselves, now this really shows me that I belong to the church of God.

What then is required of me, of me personally, in my personal relationship with God? If I belong to that people that have this special relationship with God and have these promises from God and have this gospel of salvation, what then is required of me as already belonging to that community in order that I personally and individually will be right with God?

That's the argument, that's the way we take our children through to and ourselves through to thinking about our baptism and what it signifies. Somebody once illustrated it by the issue of belonging to the royal family.

[28 : 43] If you belong to the royal family, if you're born within the royal family, let's say like Prince Charles, for example, who's the heir to the throne, born within the present royal family, the firstborn of the Queen and Prince Philip.

In terms of the advantage he has towards being in charge of the kingdom and all that kingship means, he has the advantage of being brought up in that family.

He was born into that privilege, leaving aside everything else for the moment except that particular issue. He has that privilege of being born within the royal house.

He's a royal child. He's brought up to know royal ways. He's brought up to know these things that belong to the royal family, what's expected of them, what his future actually needs to be.

Now he can turn around when he's older. He's at good age now but he could have turned around and said, I'm finished with all this.

[29 : 44] I don't want any more of this. It's not for me. He could have done that. He had the liberty to do that if he wanted, personally, although he hasn't.

He could have repudiated his upbringing. He could have said, I don't want to be known as a royal prince. I want to be a commoner. I want to be just like everybody else in the kingdom, outside the royal household.

We have that liberty in God's covenant community as well. We can say, I don't want to be a Christian.

I don't want to belong to God's people. I don't want anything to do with the gospel. God's love. But it doesn't remove the fact that God has distinguished every one of us by giving us the advantages of belonging to his church.

We can repudiate it, we can cast it off, we can say we don't want it. That's our choice. But it's not a very good one. It's one with disastrous eternal consequences.

[31 : 03] Because in the larger catechism and question 63, following on from what is the visible church, it says, what are the special privileges of the visible church? And this is how it answers.

The visible church has the privilege of being under God's special care and government, of being protected and preserved in all ages, notwithstanding the opposition of all enemies, and the privilege of enjoying the communion of saints, the ordinary means of salvation, and offers of grace by Christ to all the members of it in the ministry of the gospel, testifying that whosoever believes in him shall be saved, and excluding none that will come unto him.

Let me just read that again, especially the second part of it. The privileges that belong to us today as the visible church, the privilege of enjoying the communion of saints, God's people, the privilege of the ordinary means of salvation, such as today in the gospel, the word and the sacraments, the privilege of the offers of grace by Christ to all the members of the visible church and the ministry of the gospel, the privilege of testifying, God that is, testifying, that whoever believes in him shall be saved, and excluding none that will come unto him.

God that will come to us. We are a holy people with so many blessings and privileges in covenant with God, and because we are such, we have the privilege of giving the sign of the covenant to our children, that they already belong to the visible church, that they already have access to the privilege of belonging, and so we baptize them in the name of the triune God, this covenant God, the God by whose grace and by whose gift of the gospel we are able to say, as it is, our children are holy.

may God bless his thoughts on his word to us. We are going to sing now to God's praise in Psalm 78, Psalm 78, and verses 1 to 6, that is on page 324.

[33 : 56] While we are singing these verses, children from the Sunday school and tweenies will be coming into the church to see the baptism. So, Psalm 78, verses 1 to 6, attend my people to my law, thereto give thou an ear.

Words that from my mouth proceed attentively do hear. My mouth shall speak a parable, and sayings dark of old, the same which we have heard and known, and as our fathers told.

We also will them not conceal from their posterity, them to the generation to come, declare, will we. Verses 1 to 6, Psalm 78, let's stand.

Let's stand. for theirSM anti-concept, pathetic, stroking My God who proceed Attemptively to hear My God shall speak Now forever And say that of all The same which we have heard alone

And thus our Father's home We also will then not conceal From their prosperity And to the generation To come declare we The praises of the Lord our God And His almighty spread The wondrous works that He hath done

[36 : 48] We will show for God then His testimony and His law In this completed place And charge the Father did to show To bear succeeding grace Lots of the rich which was to come Might dwell and learn and know And sons of war

Who should arise Like to their sons and show Of the Lord Just a date Thank you.

Going through now? Yeah. Okay.

Okay. There is a document also produced by the Westminster Assembly of Divines, the same assembly that produced her catechisms and the confession of faith.

It's called the Directory of Public Worship. And in the Directory of Public Worship, we're given in what is now very ancient language directions as to, for example, how to conduct worship, but also what needs to be said or done during the administration of the sacraments, including baptism.

[39 : 33] And it says there that we are to bring before you as a people, at a baptism, consideration of your own baptism.

So that as a people, as you participate in the service and in the sacrament, you're actually here meditating upon, putting to yourselves, what your baptism signifies to you.

And how your baptism has actually come to be, in your own personal experience, something that ought to be manifested in your manner of life.

And it's the same when it comes to those who are presenting their children for baptism. The Directory of Public Worship says that the minister ought to encourage, to exhort, to give them to consider their own sinfulness, their own reliability on God's grace, the need of that grace to sustain them, the need of that grace to ourselves as a people, to be the kind of people as a family of God that we should be in regard to this family, to this child as well.

And of course, all of that is for us so important, as we were thinking of in the sermon earlier, when you begin with baptism, and you think of what baptism signifies, as our union with Christ, as the washing away of our sin, and our defilement spiritually, and how all of that, as it's signified, and how it seals that to us, in the sense of saying to us, God is faithful and will indeed be true to His promise.

[41 : 14] That's the promise that we have in the gospel of acceptance with Him and forgiveness of sin towards eternal life. And so today, that's what we're seeking to do.

Not simply watching, and not simply as parents presenting this child for baptism. It involves every single one of us in reflection on the meaning of baptism for ourselves.

And it involves the parents especially in regard to their own life, their relationship, their privilege and responsibility towards this lovely child, that she will be brought up in the ways of the Lord.

And as a Christian home, what a great advantage she has in beginning life, in that environment, as well as in that of the visible church that we all are.

So, Andrew, can I ask you now please to stand? Do you acknowledge God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God revealed in Scripture, to be the only true God and your God?

[42 : 28] Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you now promise to bring up this child in the nurture and training of the Lord? If you all please stand and remain standing after prayer.

Let's join together in prayer. Almighty God, we present ourselves before you. as defiled by sin and in need of your washing and cleansing, in need of the grace of regeneration and being born again unto eternal life.

We bless you for the promise through the gospel that this will be the property of all who trust in you, all who come by faith to deposit themselves into your care.

We thank you today for the availability to us of eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord. We thank you today for the privilege, O Lord, of being under the gospel, of being partakers of those privileges the gospel brings us.

We pray that that will today be to our advantage everlastingly. Bless us together here. Bless especially the parents, Andrew, and Marianne, as they bring their child here today for baptism.

[43 : 46] We thank you, Lord, for them, for them being part of your visible covenant community in the world, for the testimony they give personally to their faith and trust in you, and for the way that they have promised to bring up the child in the way and in the training of the Lord.

We ask your blessing, Lord, as well, for Orla, as she comes to be baptized now. We ask that you bless her as she grows and develops in her life.

We pray that all her days she will know your blessing, that she will know your protective care, your nurturing offer spiritually, your shielding offer from all that is evil and harmful in this life.

And so, Lord, we commit her into your ways and into your keeping. And ask that you'd be gracious to her all her days. Receive our thanks, we pray now, and forgive our sin for Jesus' sake.

Amen. All arose, Macaulay, I baptize you in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, one God.

[45 : 03] May God bless you and keep you. May He bring His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May He lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.

Let's again pray. Our gracious God, bless what we have done in your name. Bless, we pray, the element used to a sacred use from its ordinary use.

Bless, we pray, Andrew and Marianne and grant to Orla and grant them together as a family that they may know your continued blessing during the course of their lives.

Bless their families here with them here today and elsewhere. We pray that your blessing will extend to each and every member of the family and that today will be a day of true enjoyment for them of all the things that the gospel so richly and abundantly provides for us.

Lord, bless us now throughout the rest of this day and enable us to contemplate in our mind those things that belong to our eternal peace. We pray this in Jesus' name and for His sake.

[46 : 11] Amen. Be seated now, please. We're going to conclude our service now by singing in Psalm 32.

Psalm 32 and sing Psalms. That's on page 38. Singing the verses marked 7 to 9.

You are my hiding place, O Lord, my true security. You keep me safe in troubled days. You circle me with joyful praise when you have set me free.

7 to 9 on page 38. You are my hiding place, O Lord, my true security.

You keep me safe in troubled days. You serve me with joyful praise when you have set me free.

[47 : 42] my peace. I cheer, o Lord Curtis is of deand you've made by hand. I will guide you in my way.

My counsel I will give to you. My eye will keep your heart in you.

And watch you day by day. Do not be like the horse or you.

Which cannot understand. They must be card and get in check.

As they have right to turn their way. To go where you come.

[49 : 09] I will go to this side door this morning. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The love of God the Father. And the communion of the Holy Spirit. Be with you now and always.

Amen. Amen. Amen.